

Diocese proffers a family of faith

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

You may recall reading in the *Catholic Courier* that the first theme chosen for our diocesan Synod relates to Christian marriage and family life in all of its forms.

Concern about and interest in the family runs strong and deep among the people of our local church. That is no surprise of course, but it is very gratifying. People are concerned that the basic social unit of society is coping with difficult pressures these days. But the emergence of the theme seems also to indicate that we have a lot of energy and commitment to deal with that concern.

The family theme has been a stimulating one for me personally. I am neither husband nor father to a family, but I do come from immediate and extended families that mean a great deal to me. That's one of the reasons why I enjoy our annual family reunions so much, and visits back and forth to Waterford.

But the associations the theme raises about my own family are not the center of my reflection. That center has been

an awareness of and reflection on my relationship with you who are my family of faith.

What does it mean to be a bishop in the church? How best can we describe the relationship the bishop should have with the community? What are some of the legitimate mutual expectations that help shape the relationship between the bishop and the people, the bishops and his priests, his deacons? Are those expectations always the same or do they vary from time to time as our church changes? And how much does the personality of the individual bishop alter all of that?

As I look back on the years since my ordination as a bishop, I become more and more aware that one of the great graces of my office is that it places me in a privileged relationship with you. Let me put it this way: If the burden of the office is the range of responsibility it carries, its greatest joy is the opportunity it affords to be nourished by the wisdom, care and affection of the community. I didn't get any smarter the day I was ordained, but I was made beneficiary of the wonderful gifts held in this family of faith.

I was reminded of that gift while at St. Paul's, Webster, over the weekend. I went there to preside and preach at all of the weekend Masses, including the Mass of Dedication for their beautifully expanded and renewed church. It was a memorable experience, and as I look back on those special hours I realize that the gifted, generous people of the parish made it so.

I think of the young high school boy who proclaimed the Word with such clarity and power. I remember the group of five teenage girls who communicated a joy and openness to life to which all of us are called. And I recall with gratitude the faith and loyalty of women and men who have been with the parish from the beginning and struggled with illness just to be there that day.

Father John "Knobby" Walsh and Ray Booth were there, too. Those wonderful priests of our diocese, first Knobby and now Ray, have been privileged to serve as pastor of St. Paul's. Perhaps they, more than anyone else who reads these words, will know what I mean when I thank the community for all of the gifts St. Paul's gave me over



the weekend.

They did help me move a step further along in a process I expect and hope will be lifelong — that is, the process of staying with the questions raised at the beginning of this column.

For now let me say that the words St. Augustine spoke to his people mean more to me as the years go by: "For you I am bishop, with you I am a Christian."

Peace to all.

CENACLE OFFERS SPECIAL EVENTS

- Oct. 4-6 **JUNGAN TYPOLGY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH:** Using the Personality Theory of Carl Jung and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Sr. Kathleen O'Brien, r.c., will conduct the program which includes presentations on theory and applications, opportunity for group work and personal consultation, and places special emphasis on spiritual growth.
- Oct. 11-13 **SEASONS OF A WOMAN'S LIFE:** As a woman moves through life, she passes through certain "seasons": in her personal development, her relationships, her work, her faith. In the process, she becomes both seasoned and seasoning. A reflective weekend for women in all seasons of life given by Sr. Barbara Regan, r.c.
- Oct. 18-20 **CHARISMATIC INNER HEALING RETREAT:** The retreat provides time for Prayer and Praise, personal prayer, individual inner healing, intercessory prayer and confessions. Given by Sr. Joan Kellenberg, r.c., Mrs. Mary Dean, Mrs. Peggy Matuozzi, and Mr. Michael Koegel.
- Oct. 25-27 **TRAPPED OVERWORKED, UNAPPRECIATED, AND LONELY?** Have my responsibilities robbed me of joy? Why do I let it happen? A retreat weekend designed to help you answer these questions will be given by Srs. Annette Mittle, r.c. and Margie Mayk, r.c.

SPECIAL SERIES

- Thurs. Oct. 3; Nov. 7; Dec. 5 **IN SEARCH OF GRACE AND FREEDOM: LIVING OUR RELATIONSHIPS**
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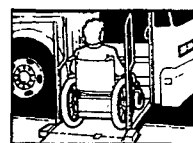
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